Evaluation of the Impact of Teaching Scotland's Future

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Introduction

In 2010, Graham Donaldson undertook a review of teacher education. His report, 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (TSF), concluded that the two most important ways in which school education can realise the high aspirations Scotland has for its young people are through supporting and strengthening the quality of teaching and the quality of leadership. The report also set out recommendations for improvements. In 2015 Ipsos MORI was commissioned to evaluate the early impact of TSF.

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to guide and inform future improvements in teacher education and professional learning and, ultimately, to help build the capacity of teachers and improve the learning of young people.

The evaluation did not assess progress on each of the 50 recommendations set out in TSF, and, although some of the drivers and facilitators of change were examined, it did not attempt to measure the precise contribution of TSF to areas where there has been progress. Rather, this evaluation offers an overview of the current landscape of teacher education, highlighting what progress has been made in key areas since TSF was published and where further progress is still needed.

Methods

The evaluation was conducted between July 2015 and February 2016 using a mixed-method approach. An online survey was carried out among a representative sample of teachers (the achieved sample was 6,346 and the response rate was 21%); 80 teachers took part in 15 focus groups and a further 33 took part in in-depth interviews; and in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from all 32 Local Authorities (LAs) and 21 other key educational stakeholders (see end-note[i] for further details).

The context

The 2010 TSF review of teacher education took place at a time when governments across the world were reforming their education systems to address challenges arising from globalisation, societal change and technological development. The immediate context in Scotland was, and remains, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The opportunity offered – and the challenge posed – by CfE is that curriculum development, and transformational change at school and system level, will be driven by the professional capacity of teachers rather than through the central development of guidance and resources and external accountability.The recommendations contained in TSF were designed to build the capacity of the teaching profession to deliver this ambitious reform.

In the five years since TSF was published, there has been no let up in the pace of change and implementation of the recommendations has taken place against a challenging background. In addition to CfE, teachers are adapting to, and implementing, significant new policies and initiatives including the new National Qualifications, Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Raising Attainment for All. At the same time, resources (particularly LA resources) have been constrained; there are widespread problems obtaining supply cover; and recruitment of teachers in some geographic areas and subjects has become increasingly difficult. All of these issues have impacted on workloads.

Key findings: progress

The teaching profession has risen to the challenge set out in TSF. The evaluation found evidence of real progress in many areas of teacher education and, above all, there has been a significant shift in the culture of professional learning. This shift in culture was demonstrated in four key areas of improvement:

- **teachers are more engaged with professional learning**. Several inter-related aspects to this increased engagement were identified: heightened awareness of the importance of professional learning; a move away from a conception of professional learning as 'going on a course' and a broader understanding of the range of professional learning activities; increased ownership by individual teachers' of their Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL); and an increased focus on learning relevant to a teacher's own particular development needs.

- **there is a greater focus on the impact of professional learning on pupils**. Decisions about what professional learning to undertake are now more likely to involve a consideration of the needs of the individual pupils that a teacher is working with.

- there is a consensus that **teachers are engaging in professional dialogue more often** and that there has been a cultural shift towards more openness, sharing of experience and willingness to talk about pedagogy.

- **there is a greater willingness to try new approaches.** One important marker of the change in culture is that a sizeable minority of teachers (41%) say that they try new teaching practices and strategies more often than they

did five years ago (40% say they try them the same amount and 18% say they try them less often).

In addition to this cultural shift, there have been a number of specific improvements to teacher education at all stages:

- At the Initial Teacher Education and early career stage, partnerships between LAs and universities have developed further, and support for students on placement and probationary teachers has improved.

- In relation to CLPL, the proportion of teachers reporting that they face barriers in accessing professional learning has greatly decreased in the last five years, from 68% in 2010 to 42% in 2015. This is, in part, due to their increased participation in a wider range of different professional learning activities and, in particular, an increase in collaborative working and in-school activity.

- There has also been a substantial increase in the number of teachers participating in mentoring/coaching and indications of an increased interest in, and increased provision of, professional learning opportunities to develop mentoring and coaching skills.

- Although there was already a considerable focus on leadership prior to TSF, it has increased further and teachers (at all career stages) are more aware of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The new General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Standard for Leadership and Management has helped clarify the pathway for formal leadership positions. Leadership skills are the main focus for head teachers' CLPL and they reported that both the range and the number of high quality CLPL opportunities available to them have increased over the past five years.

What has helped change the culture?

Participants in the qualitative research pointed to several factors which they felt had driven the cultural changes discussed above. Some of these were a direct result of TSF, some were given increased impetus by TSF and some were independent.

There was widespread agreement that the introduction of Professional Update and the new GTCS Standards played a very important role in increasing engagement with professional learning. It was felt that the new Standards provided coherence to CLPL through all career stages. It was also noted that they promoted a shared language around CLPL and pedagogy.

There was also a widespread view that the 'new generation' of teachers emerging from Initital Teacher Education in recent years had helped change the culture. It was felt that it was 'ingrained' in these teachers from the start that they should be self-reflective, engage in professional dialogue, share practice and work collaboratively. Not only did this help change the culture simply because the new generation were gradually replacing the older generation, but it also forced more experienced staff to 'raise their game'.

There were two other factors, independent of TSF, which were felt to be important drivers of the cultural shift. Firstly, the need to adapt to the significant changes in Scottish education in recent years including GIRFEC, the new National Qualifications, How Good is Our School and, above all, CfE. It was suggested that the only way that teachers could possibly keep up to date and adapt to these changes was by engaging more with professional learning – and with professional dialogue and collaborative working in particular.

Secondly, reduced resources (particularly LA support and provision of courses) and limitations on time had forced schools and individual members of staff to look at other ways of meeting professional learning needs. Although the drivers may have been unwelcome, it was clear that this had stimulated more internal work within schools, more collaborative working among colleagues, more sharing of practice, and more variety and creativity in ways to achieve professional learning. It also encouraged prioritisation of activities that would have most impact on pupils and best meet the development needs of the individual teachers.

Key findings: remaining challenges

Nonetheless, there was widespread acknowledgement – across the teaching profession and among LA and national stakeholders – that there is a considerable way to go before the vision set out in TSF is fully realised. As one participant put it 'the profession is on the path, but not there yet'.

The evaluation has identified the following areas where further improvement is required – or where progress would help facilitate improvements:

- At the Initial Teacher Education and early career stage, the development of teachers would be enhanced by: further clarification and agreement of the respective roles of the school and the university in relation to joint assessment; improved communication between the university and the school on aspects of student placements; and the provision of additional support for probationers to further develop key pedagogical skills.

- CLPL for class teachers could be improved by: increasing their awareness and involvement in LA/university partnerships; raising awareness of different options for Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level 11 learning; better Professional Review and Development support for supply teachers; developing a shared understand of coaching and mentoring; increasing coaching and mentoring skills; and by encouraging teachers to reflect more on experiences of leading initiatives and more actively using the experiences to develop leadership skills.

- CLPL for all teachers could be enhanced by better signposting to high quality resources and by the development of more professional networks. With so much creativity happening at a school level, networks could help share good practice more effectively and they would be particularly beneficial for those with relatively specialist expertise, interests or needs.

There are also two system-wide challenges that should be addressed. Firstly, the difficulties in obtaining supply cover due to a lack of available supply teachers : this is one of the main barriers to CLPL.

Secondly, the number of national 'priorities'. One of the concerns most commonly raised was that there are currently too many priorities in education. This has a perceived impact on Initial Teacher Education (because of the need to cover all the different, emerging priorities which leaves less time for core pedagogical skills) and on CLPL more generally (because the impact on workloads reduced the time available for CLPL and some of the remaining CLPL time was spent 'getting to grips' with the priorities).

Some of these improvements will be easier to achieve than others and most will require the teaching profession, universities providing teacher education, LAs and national bodies to continue to work together. However, the significant progress that has already been made and the teaching profession's engagement with professional learning provides a strong base. With the continued commitment and support of all stakeholders, the next five years should see the teaching profession move further along the path and 'strengthen further its vital role in building Scotland's future.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

☐ are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

☐ are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>

☒ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact james.niven@gov.scot for further information.

☐ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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